

EDITORIAL



Marketing priorities, technology and the future

Leading change has been an important characteristic of the Academy of Marketing over the last decade. Recognising the need to better meet the needs of our academic community today and to shape the direction of the Academy in the future, we initiated the first substantial change to the format of the annual conference with the introduction of capacity building research workshops in 2018 that sat alongside the more familiar theme-based tracks. This workshop format came into its own when, following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the cancellation of the annual conference in 2020, the 2021 conference was held entirely online.

As we all negotiated our way through the challenges of an unprecedented external environment, our Annual Conference focused on how Marketing could play its part in helping to shape the Academy's engagement with economic, social, political and cultural change. We asked for expressions of interest for workshops that addressed the theme of Reframing Marketing Priorities. The response was overwhelming, culminating in 18 workshops which considered how marketing priorities should be reframed, both theoretically and practically, and also how our teaching and engagement might be impacted.

The workshops that invited participants were as follows: Access, Inclusion and Care in Marketing: Reflections and learnings from Covid-19; Consumer Research with Social Impact During a Pandemic: Reflections on academic identities; Consumer Spaces Post-Covid: Back to normal or new normals?; Creating and Delivering Digital, Innovative and Authentic Assessments; Democratising and Decentering Marketing Inquiry; Embedding Sustainability and Responsibility into the Marketing Curriculum; Harnessing the Power of Word-of-Mouth; Identifying the Not-for-Profit Marketing Visionaries; Innovations in Learning and Teaching for Use in COVID-19 and Beyond: Pedagogic practice reframed; Purpose Driven Brands: The rise of social sustainability; Reframing Circular Economy as a Marketing Priority: Emphasising the role of consumers; Reframing our Priorities: Understanding and tackling consumption insecurities; Searching for the New 'Normal': Sustainability in a digital age; Taking the Experiential Online: Engaging consumers virtually during Covid-19; The Power of Visual Methods in Understanding the 'New Normal'; Transformative and Critical Marketing Pedagogies; Weaving Connections: Advancing theoretical insights into gift giving in the 2020s; Wellbeing within Service Ecosystems. Papers submitted could be expansions of the individual papers submitted to the workshops or come from collaboration between workshop participants.

Workshop convenors and/or participants were invited to submit expressions of interest to be included in this special issue. The six papers in this special issue share a focus on exploring how technology can be harnessed not only in the practice of marketing but in teaching, participating in events and even imagining the future. The papers are theoretically and methodologically diverse and address developing assessment strategies for work-ready graduates (Montano, Gill-Simmen, Lee, Walsh Duffy & Newman) online

consumption of the arts (Nguyen, Preece and vom Lehn) virtual participation in sports events and community building (Bunds, Tang & Koenigstorfer), online religious engagement and the digital 'aura' (Trang and Davies), entrepreneurial decision-making in virtual environments (Bruce, Rooney, and Krolikowska) and opportunities for stakeholder co-creation of smart cities (Vijaygopal, Bennett and Savani).

Montano, Gill-Simmen, Lee, Walsh, Duffy and Newman argue that traditional assessment practices fail to meet the needs of work-ready graduates in marketing. They highlight the potentiality of assessment approaches that replicate industry practice and provide students with the opportunity to develop much needed employability skills. Their paper is the result of a post-workshop collaboration, where the authors and coordinators of the workshop developed analysis of four cases focused on the use of authentic assessment in marketing education. Intended to support further development of authentic assessment, the authors highlight how a range of different forms of authentic assessments can be used to encourage students to develop the skills and attitudes needed in their professional lives. They show how each of the four assessments meet the requirements of an authentic assessment and how they are aimed at developing a range of competences, including knowledge, skills and attitudes. This paper provides an important opportunity to explore how we continue to support students and prepare graduates even as we continue to reframe marketing priorities.

Linh Dan Nguyen, Chloe Preece and Dirk vom Lehn shift our focus to the art gallery. COVID-19 required cultural institutions to rapidly shift their practices online to continue to engage audiences during the pandemic. Indeed, 'the desire to be connected and to support the arts in a difficult time meant that audiences as well as artists and arts organisations were willing to experiment with new ways of performing, participating, and engaging with art' (Kerrigan & Preece, 2022, p. i). Nguyen et al. take a multi-sensory and embodied approach to arts consumption, following Merleau-Ponty's theory of art, to understand interaction in virtual art conversations. Their ethnomethodological analysis explores the interactions between visitor participants and art museum professionals as part of an online art event run by a small arts museum in the US. In earlier work, vom Lehn (2006) examined how strangers in art galleries can influence how art consumers engage in meaning making, and Nguyen et al.'s study demonstrates how a shift to online necessitates new ways of examining and understanding the role of embodied vision.

Staying with the shift from physical participation to virtual, Bunds, Tang and Koenigstorfer examine the concept of community building derived from virtual participation in charity sports events. Understanding the motivation for participating in charity events is important in terms of charities continuing to benefit from fundraising through the organisation or participation in such events. To date, the focus has been upon understanding community-building practices in person events, and little has been known about this in relation to virtual events. The authors focused on a case study of World Vision, a US-based charity which capitalised on its existing virtual community building practices to develop Team World Vision, organising virtual events, and online supports and meetings for runners. They introduce the concept of the practice of fitness philanthropy to our understanding of virtual communities, setting out theoretical and practical implications from their study.

Mai Khanh Tran and Andrew Davies introduce us to the world of Mega Churches. They highlight that despite increasing secularisation in Western Europe, the large majority of people retain significant religious beliefs worldwide. Importantly, one notable relatively

recent development relates to technology, and the possibilities offered by the online production and consumption of religious services. Specifically, the authors examine the digitalisation of religious services within the context of a Pentecostal megachurch, using Benjamin's aura framework to explore how online services are able to encapsulate an 'aura' of the church for online congregants. While the paper acknowledges reinforces the importance of ritual and tradition within religious worship, it proposes that digitisation imbues its own aura, leading to a refashioning of certain practices which ultimately change the way members engage in ritual events.

Helen L. Bruce, Tara Rooney and Ewa Krolukowska examine the entrepreneurial marketing decision-making of women microbusiness owners during the COVID-19 pandemic. Once again, we see the necessity of these business owners, providers of children's activities, to shift from face-to-face service provision to virtual. While much of the focus on entrepreneurship is on the individual entrepreneur, here we see the importance of communities of practice and networks in facilitated interactions and decision-making. Participants in their study shifted from long-term planning to focus on the short term, and following the principle of effectuation in their decision-making.

Rohini Vijaygopal, Roger Bennett and Sharmila Savani explore the possibilities of, and barriers to, stakeholder co-creation of smart cities. One issue that the authors identify is a lack of clarity around the definition and manifestation of a smart city. Drawing on quite an extensive, developing literature about the phenomenon, Vijavgopal et al. note the range of contexts from purpose built, technology enabled urban areas to 'individual or collections of ad hoc initiatives applied across entire urban conurbations'. Taking this diversity into account through their qualitative research design, the authors looked at who was involved in these projects and how they were marketed and branded. Their findings have implications for place marketing as well as new product development fields, as they take a new product development approach to understanding smart cities. Argumentative discourse analysis was used in making sense of the decision-making process and outcomes, inspired by the use of this approach within the field of urban planning. Contrary to suggestions that residents be involved in smart city decision-making, the authors found that this was largely dominated by local government with limited local business or citizen engagement. The authors highlight the potential of marketing and place branding practices in future smart city developments.

A key element of the conference has always been to provide a venue for scholars to come together, make connections and hopefully use these to develop future collaborations with like-minded colleagues. To facilitate this, we invested in a highly interactive virtual meeting space to facilitate conversations and collaborations alongside the more formal elements. We also chose our Keynote speakers to enhance and extend our agenda to build our capacity to align marketing priorities with societal challenges. Consequently, we were delighted to host Professor Ashlee Humphreys, and Professor Andy Prothero, as important pillars in advancing our change agenda.

Professor Ashlee Humphreys holds a joint appointment as Professor of Marketing at the Kellogg School of Management and Medill School of Journalism, Media and Integrated Marketing Communications at Northwestern University, USA. A sociologist by training, Professor Humphreys' research investigates the role of legal and cultural institutions in creating markets, the influence of language on consumer judgements of legitimacy, and the process of consumer co-creation. Her work has been pivotal to bringing institutional theory

to marketing, specifically highlighting the importance of legitimacy and the legitimization process for understanding marketing practices. Professor Humphreys is exceptionally well published in top-tier journals, such as the *Journal of Marketing*, and the *Journal of Marketing Research*. Her keynote speech was based on one of her many papers in the *Journal of Consumer Research*. She shared her insights on 'The Textuality of Markets: Insights from Studying Meaning and Materiality in the US Cannabis Market'. In progressing our programme for change a key pillar is continually to push forward the quality research agenda for our community. We were particularly pleased to attract Professor Humphreys as a keynote speaker; her presentation very much helped us to continue to advance our quality research agenda.

Andy Prothero, Professor of Business and Society at University College Dublin is well known for her work on gender and marketing. As we were organising the 2021 conference, she was putting the final touches to a special issue *#MeToo and Beyond: Inequality and Injustice in Marketing Practice and Academia* that she co-edited with Professor Mark Tadajewski for this journal. Rather than opting for the safe route and talking about gender and marketing from a purely academic viewpoint, Andy volunteered to share her personal experiences as a woman in academia. In her presentation titled 'Me, the Patriarchy and the Marketing Academy', Andy generously and selflessly explored her journey. Using the analogy of 'death by a million cuts', she detailed how enmeshed and embedded the patriarchy is and the impact this had on her career, health, and well-being. Acknowledging the positive response by members of the academy Andy turned her AM2021 keynote into an essay on 'Me, The Patriarchy and the Business School'. Published in the *Journal of Management Studies* (2023) this has already caused quite a stir, not only within the academic community, gaining much traction on LinkedIn, X (formerly twitter), etc. As an Academy we are proud of the impact Professor Prothero's work has had, and we can also be proud of our role in encouraging her to be brave.

We encourage you to read this Special Issue in this spirit of bravery and be open not only to the opportunities to reframe marketing priorities but to embrace the opportunities to advance and realise these priorities through technology.

References

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